



# THE PARENTING CENTER

## PRESS

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### The Parenting Center

*To find out about upcoming Parenting Center presentations and workshops, contact the Center at 973-762-5600 ext. 1850*

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### Floor Time

Stanley Greenspan, leading child psychiatrist and author of **The Challenging Child**, recommends that parents spend 20 minutes per day of "floor time" with a child in order to build self esteem and reduce disruptive behavior. Floor time is simply unstructured play time.

Floor time is especially effective with sensitive kids and kids who have trouble communicating verbally. Play time allows kids to explore emotions in a safe, creative environment. This reduces the overload kids feel, and therefore the need to act out.

Play with your child at his level. Get down on the floor. (Or sit at a table if that's what he wants !)

Let your child take the lead. Let him choose the game. Don't direct a game to make it more realistic or educational.

Let your child's imagination do the work. If he pretends that the chair is a monster or the table a fort, go with it! You're there to thicken the plot, your child is there to create it.

Be patient. It might feel awkward at first to play like a child. The goal in floor time is to create a sense of warmth and to develop a positive bond with your child, based on his interests. With practice, however, you might learn to truly enjoy it!

### The Family Meeting

Family meetings are a great way to build cooperation in your family. One of the most important elements of a family meeting is that each person has a chance to be heard. Children feel more responsible when they have a say in what goes on. Following are ideas adapted from **The Parent's Handbook**, by Dinkmeyer, McKay & Dinkmeyer.

- ◆ **Meet regularly.** Try to schedule a meeting once a week. A typical meeting should last 20 to 30 minutes. You can call a special meeting when an urgent situation arises.
- ◆ **Create a list of topics.** Post the list on the refrigerator. Family members can add to the list before the meeting. Decide in advance which topics you will cover at the meeting. (*Topics include: problems, upcoming events, chores, rules, privileges, etc.*)
- ◆ **Give everyone a chance to speak.** Decide who will speak first. Then allow each family member to express his or her views. Insist that family members remain quiet while a person is speaking.
- ◆ **Promote problem solving.** Teach children to use the **SODAS** technique to solve problems. *Situation • Options • Disadvantages • Advantages • Solutions.*
- ◆ **Take notes.** Note the agreed-upon details of plans, solutions to problems, etc. Summarize the notes at the end of the meeting. Post the notes in a central location. Read notes at the next meeting.
- ◆ **Make it fun.** Supply popcorn and beverages. Plan a fun event. Tell jokes. Make the family meeting an event kids will want to return to again and again.

## HOW DO YOU HELP A CHILD WHO FREQUENTLY MISBEHAVES?

According to Lee Canter, author of numerous parenting books, a child who regularly misbehaves needs to face specific, consistent consequences in order to stop the behavior. Canter suggests following:

**Provide your child with clear rules.** For example, no hitting, no swearing, no pulling the cat's tail, etc. Give positive recognition such as praise or privileges when your child successfully follows rules. Explain what will happen if your child breaks rules.

**Give consistent, specific consequences for misbehavior.** A child must know that each time he chooses to misbehave you will take action. Consequences are not meant to punish — they are meant to help your child stop unacceptable behavior. Minimal consequences, as opposed to severe consequences, are often **most** effective because you are likely to use them consistently. Minimal consequences include time-outs, loss of specific privileges, etc.

**Develop a discipline hierarchy.** Create a set of consequences. Tell your child what will happen the first, second, third, and fourth time he breaks the rules within a day. For example, a warning the first time, a 5-minute time-out the second, 10 minutes the third, etc.

**A consequence should be given as soon as possible after the misbehavior.**

A consequence given immediately will be much more effective than one given hours later.

## Charting Progress

Some kids need additional structure to accomplish a specific task or overcome a problem. Here's a technique that can help.

1. **Work with your child to decide upon a specific behavior to change.** Simply asking your child to be good or respectful can be vague. Instead, help your child focus on specific skills such as putting clothes in the hamper, using words instead of hitting, being quiet while someone is speaking, etc. It's important that the behavior skill is **quantifiable** and **attainable**. A child must understand exactly what she must do. (*Start with one or two behavior changes. Too many will set your child up for failure.*)

2. **Use a weekly chart to keep track of progress.** Work with your child to decide upon a sticker to use when she achieves a specific behavior. Use a different sticker when she fails to achieve the behavior. Use stickers on daily basis. Be sure to encourage your child, even when she fails.

3. **Agree upon an award for achieving desired behavior.** Awards might include a favorite meal, extra computer or t.v. time, a sleepover with a friend, etc. Agree upon a specific goal for earning the award, for example, 5 consecutive days of desired behavior.

4. **Adjust goal if necessary.** If your child cannot achieve the desired behavior in a week or two, it might be too difficult. Try an easier goal. Once your child has achieved a small goal, she can work towards the more difficult goal.

### How to Praise Effectively:

1. Describe what you see. (*"I see a clean floor, an empty waste basket, and shoes in the closet."*)
2. Describe what you feel. (*"It's a pleasure to walk into this room!"*)
3. Sum up your child's praiseworthy behavior in one word. (*"You put your clothes in the hamper and your shoes in the closet. That's what I call organization!"*)

#### Suggested Reading:

**The Challenging Child.** Stanley I. Greenspan, M.D. Addison Wesley.

**The Parent's Handbook.** Don Dinkmeyer, Sr., Gary D. McKay, Don Dinkmeyer, Jr. AGS

**Raising Your Spirited Child Workbook.** Mary Sheedy Kurcinka. HarperPerennial.